The Baily Star

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Water-logging in the City

Last week's torrential rain was a great leveller. It made sure, among other things, the capital city lost its precious little privilege of keeping above the great confluence of flood waters. With the elements conspiring, Dhaka expressed solidarity with the rest of the country, thanks to its poor drainage system. Even as the pauses between showers in the last couple of days grew longer and the sun made its presence felt in a generally overcast sky, Dhaka's aquatic existence looks certain to prolong.

Whenever the flood waters subside, the vast bodies of accumulated stinky stagnant water will also make their way out leaving the city, especially its roads, in a pathetic state. Flood water in our country, specially in the rural areas, is not deemed as a complete curse, there is a pretty positive side to it. While receding, flood waters leave a film of alluvial soil that goes to replenish its fertility. Not so in the city. What lessons the logged water of Dhaka city will leave with its authorities? It is pretty simple. Dhaka's surface and underground drainage system is on the verge of a collapse making the city chronically prone to water-logging. Let alone heavy monsoon rain and a calamitous countrywide flood situation like this, Dhaka is affected even by the slightest spells of shower. The pattern has been like this for years now. And the reasons behind this annual suffering are not unknown. Filling out of waterways in and around Dhaka, worsened by the polybag garbage, rapid urbanisation, unplanned and unauthorised construction work, lack of civic sense have all contributed to the collapse of the surface and underground drainage system.

To our relief though, in an interview with The Daily Star recently, a top WASA official described water-logging as a solvable problem. We have also heard about massive repairing programme for Dhaka's comatose drainage system. But we have not seen any result yet. The problem seems to be more of a coordinated approach than anything else. We want city authorities to pay immediate attention to this problem

Private Investment in Health

A vast scope exists for private investment in the largely underdeveloped specialised medicare sector of the country. In the razzmatazz of the private clinic business we should not lose sight of that wonderful prospect.

The privately-run facilities with their list of roving specialists are basically generalised health service units, not to say anything of their highly commercialised and often notoriously unprofessional perfunctoriness. Some specialists do offer exclusive services but they are few and far between amidst a population of over 120 million. Given the increasing incidence of cardiovascular, carcinogenic, respiratory, gastro-intestinal, neurological, gynecological, and orthopaedic complications our specialists seem motivationally and technologically handicapped in coping with patients in those

areas. For this precise reason, those who can afford treatment abroad go for it at the expense of the country's heard-earned foreign exchange. And the majority who are less solvent have to accept the generally indifferent medicare at home. If an adequate number of specialised medical centres are opened keeping an eye on both these categories of clientele we shall have done a great service to the nation. Not only to the cause of advanced medical treatment at competitive costs but also to that of bringing the latest technology into the country.

A case in point is the newly established Tairunnessa Memorial Medical Centre (TMMC), the firstever state of the art private heart hospital at Konia, Gazipur some 28 kms from Dhaka city. Sonali Bank had provided a loan worth Tk 150 million for this Tk 300 million project. In addition to some more of this kind in the cardiovascular field, we should welcome specialised facilities in other areas too. The investible surpluses of the Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) wait to be garnered for this purpose. Endowment funds may also be generated locally from among the super-rich. The newly-established specialised hospitals would help us build a pool of new manpower, and with enhanced capacity building, we shall be in a position to catch up with the latest and best in global medicare.

Myanmar Hotting Up

Following the first stand-off over military junta's refusal to let Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the democracy movement in Myanmar, meet her party supporters outside Yangon there has been yet another attempt last week to infringe on the rights of this irrepressible lady. This latest obstructionist act of the military followed by a couple of relevant incidents suggest that the regime is getting impatient and pervy with Suu Kyi. Amid global condemnation of its attempt to restrict the movement of the champion of democracy and concern over her physical welfare, the junta is indulging in acts that smack little of sense.

A UN official looking to check into Suu Kyi's health and sanity and explore the possibility of a mediation between the two estranged parties has been refused entry into Myanmar. And then a medley of foreign activists spreading leaflets in favour of the brewing democracy movement and Suu Kyi were put behind the bars and later expelled from that country. While all this flurry of activities speak of a heightened campaign against the military government in Myanmar, they also accentuate the need for the world to be qui vive about their possible repercussions. We welcome international community's initiatives to communicate with Myanmar's military rulers for a transition to democracy; but as these go on, all concerned must ensure that Suu Kyi's rights as a citizen and popular leader are restored immediately. Myanmar is an important country in our neighbourhood and

we urge its early return to democracy.

A Zero-Sum Game

India's voice in South Asia is not being heard with any noticeable respect after her great nuclear feat. Even the great powers do not see for her any distinctive great power role in South Asia as evident from their even handed deal with the South Asian countries.

S claimed by Indian leadership the primary aim of nuclear tests in May last was to Limprove its national security. Security is always a matter of perception and none can challenge the way the Indians perceived it. But one can however critically look at whether her security has improved in any tangible way after

the tests. India has, of late, been seriously worrying about the security environment in her neighbourhood which in the perception of the Indians deteriorated over recent times. She particularly pointed to China's growing nuclear prowess and reinvented in China her principal enemy. She felt disturbed at China's persistent nuclear collaboration with Pakistan. India also referred to China's increasing inroads into Myanmar touching almost the fringes of Indian islands of Andmans. She seemed to have been unnerved also by the test firing of Pakistan's Ghauri missile which she believed was the result of China's collaboration. With all these developments she was convinced that her security was at stake.

What India did not spell out but could have

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nuclear India now make a greater or faster socioeconomic progress as a result of her nuclear tests? Far from achieving better security from her nuclearisation India continues to be mired in perpetual insecurities most of which emanate from within her territorial boundary - her grinding poverty, political chaos, divisive society and so on. She cannot deal with her turbulent north-east. How can she deal with a giant like China whose international standing has been consolidated by India's nuclear tests and after President Clinton assigned her a strategic role in ensuring peace and stability in Asia? Given the already precarious state of Pakistan's security she has little to lose in the gamble. So it will be difficult for India to browbeat Pakistan either on Kashmir or elsewhere. In Kashmir which is kept under In-dia with half a million troops, Pakistan alone has chances to gain in any future developments in that defiant state. In fact India with her nuclearisation has created more enemies both externally and internally. In the opinion of the Union Home Minister L K Advani and the rabble rousers in Sangh Parivar any one opposing the 'virtue' of

India's nuclearisation will be straight away PERSPECTIVES branded as the enemy from within' and 'antinational'. It is by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz not thus surprising that the Indian academics even with a cre-

dential of sanity

population and concomitant power potentials India was entitled to it. The Indians have for long set their eyes on it and must have thought that the possession of an impressive array of nuclear weapons would, like other permanent

members, win for India this prize at some stage. Another unspelt objective could have been a wider recognition at least within South Asia that India was a major power and ought to be viewed with awe and respect by her neighbours including Pakistan. With the overwhelming weight of both nuclear and conventional arsenal the Indians could have hoped to compel Pakistan to give up her claim for the solution of Kashmir problem and her nagging insistence on maintaining a military parity with India.

After three months of Pokhran II and Pakistan's Chagai Hills tests as well as gradual settling down of the dusts they kicked off in international arena a time has come to reckon how much of these objectives have been achieved by India. The first on the balance sheet is, of course, the question of India's security. Has it been in any way improved with her acquisition

of nuclear power? Nuclear weapons never gives security to a country - not even to the mightiest of the nuclear powers. The country of US stature with her awe-inspiring nuclear arsenal does not have any known defence against another nuclear weapon if someone wishes to lob a device at her. How can India ensure her security so long as Pakistan and China have an unknown number of nuclear devices that can be thrown at India? Nevertheless, the most crucial question from the point of view of the rest of the world is: Will

 are to day justifying India's nuclear tests in a bizarre fashion.

As regards UN permanent seat it looks nearly as distant as it was before the tests. Even if there were some positive indications earlier for considering India as a credible candidate. that prospect has evaporated immediately with her nuclear conduct. If some of the reactions of the big five are any guide the seat is going to be denited to India. But the Indian foreign policy experts might be right in thinking that eventually nuclear India may force the rest of the world to accommodate her into UN Security Council. But at this stage great powers are reluctant to recognise India's greatness in any

India's voice in South Asia is not being heard with any noticeable respect after her great nuclear feat. Even the great powers do not see for her any distinctive great power role in South Asia as evident from their even handed deal with the South Asian countries. If President Clinton eventually visits South Asia his port of call will certainly not be restricted only to Delhi.

At the same time no South Asian country let alone Pakistan - seems to recognise India's superiority. With Pakistan's nuclear tests the strategic advantage that India was looking for has been decidedly lost. Pakistanis have forced themselves on the consciousness of the rest of the world that on the question of nuclear capability they are fairly close to India. The emerging reality is that India is no greater than what it was three months ago and no one is going to listen to her with any greater respect than before.

The Trauma of Invectives

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

It is of no use to attribute the current inertia to past political induction. Instead there should be a more objective and introspective analytical examination of the whole issue ...

VER the past several days I have been ensnared with an intriguing thought. I have been asking myself if one respectable and responsible citizen of the country can threat another citizen, equally, if not more, respectable and responsible, with taking the latter's life. To me a public statement of threat has more dangerous portends than a privately uttered one. Because, such type of threat on life can incite and provoke the followers into action. Now I ask if such wild, provocative utterance can be vindicated by any sensible person. Precisely, shall I say whether or not the CrPc provides any redress to the person so threatened. I understand that in such cases the aggrieved has a right to make a GD entry against the probable perpetrator of the crime, with any police station. But I am yet to know the extent of practical action that the law enforcing agency could take. I have my doubts if they can do anything at all. Tradition has it that they wait till the actual assault is made. That means the target has to pass through sleepless nights in terrifying uncer-

All I have said are true for an ordinary citizen. But when it relates to highly placed personages in the Government machinery and those in the opposition leadership it is bound to evoke more serious concern. Expressing her extreme unhappiness with the present Government the flamboyant leader of the opposition made a public statement in a meeting at Paltan maidan asking her listeners to wait for a replication of the August 15, 1975 incident. Such seditious haranguing at her party supporters tantamounts to a veritable threat on the life of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This is not the first time that the BNP leaders have made such threats openly in public meetings. In 1997 too men like Mir Showkat Ali, Gayeshwar Ray, Mirza Abbas and others were heard in the same megalomaniac, insolent utterances. And all of them did so with impunity. They continue with their stale vituperation undaunted despite sporadic rejoinders from the other camp.

In the height of everything, their literal acrobatics in defense of the dubious integrity of the idol leader, can be construed to have grotesque attempts atlegitimizing corruption in the country. The thematic value of 'equality of every citizen in the eye of law seems to have fallen in the quagmire. Their recent escorting the leader to the court for hearing specific charges of corruption in thousands chanting acrimonious slogans and their vicious enthusiasm to mercilessly beat up BIWTA workers going there coincidentally in connection with another case against their leaders

proved again how formidable they were. Even the trying magistrate of the court had to succumb to their violent pressure and to offer the accused a seat, not in the dock, but by his side on the rostrum. A unique and unprecedented example was thus set, obviously under the agonizing pressure of the situation which otherwise could have been disastrous. Nevertheless, the prestige of the court had been pitiably dwarfed and made vulnerable. The administration on the other hand, has been merely a silent, helpless onlooker. Some would, rightly or

wrongly or by pure hypothetical

inferences, seek to find a strange linkage of all these events to the trial of Bangabandhu murder case. The depositions of over three scores prosecution witnesses were reportedly concluded. The last being the Investigation officer Mr Kahhar and arguments/cross examination would follow soon. At this point in time the developments in the Thai capital Bangkok and subsequent visit of Thai Deputy Foreign Minister to Dhaka can be related. The extradition treaty between Thailand and Bangladesh has now cleared the problem for Thailand to extradite Maj (rtd) Bazlul Huda, an accused in Bangabandhu murder case, to Bangladesh. The visiting Thai Dy Foreign Minister's observations on the extradition treaty in Dhaka were sharply reacted upon by vested quarters which was followed by calls of threat on telephone to blow up the Thai Embassy in Dhaka. All these events arranged in chronological sequence would surface a deeprooted offensive being geared up to foil the current proceedings in the court by those whose complicity in the gruesome murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with almost all his family members shall have been known to the nation during the impending cross-examination and arguments. Politicisation of killings of the adversaries has been a favourite pastime with some of our lead-

Conversely, there are leaders too who are immune from such perverted overtures. They are the ones who nurse genuine sympathies for all those affected by the killings of their

dear ones. Although displaying stoic fortitude to bear the ghastly shock Sheikh Hasina has always been pleading for punitive action against the perpetrators of such crimes in unequivocal term. Coming to power she did either order for accelerating the legal proceedings in General Manzur's killing or initiated spontaneous action to revitalize the one relating to General Zia's assassination.

Begum Zia too appears to me having the same human feeling

but her total silence or indifference to the natural demand to get to books the killers of her warrior husband remains inexplicably preponderant. Her stance, on the contrary, in Manzur's case is significant though preposterous, in as much as that she has, in the back of her mind, General Ershad, the alleged main accused. Invariably, it fringes upon political vilification. Even, in recent times, her initial stand on Rubel — a student of the International University, who died in police custody appeared to be the height of her mental obsession. She was repulsed instantly by Rubel's father through a public statement that his son did not belong to any political party. With an unsavoury and unpredictable slap on her face she did, however, shift quickly from a dubious political stand-off and made it instantly a humanitarian issue, purporting to vindicate it through a half-day hartal. In any case, there was politics underneath which was openly detested by Rubel's parents and other close relations. It is, however, good to observe that the Government has taken the tragic incident with highest importance and unprecedented seriousness.

With Rubel's predatory type of murder the whole police administration has fallen in to an abysmal quagmire feared to have gone beyond salvation. A major shake-up though appearing to have been of paramount necessity, the undercurrent of disaffection being pro-active its practical implementation may remain an uncertainty. It is of no use to attribute the current inertia to past political induction. Instead there should be a more objective and introspective analytical examination of the whole issue free from the usual bureaucratic interven-

Let us dive deep into the causes, not the effects and in that there must be total participation of legal experts, jurists, criminologists, teachers of jurisprudence, social scientists, psychologists, administrators top ranking civil and military officials, political leaders judges of the high courts, theologists, medical professionals of high repute, elites etc. The common, national goal will be one: How best to rebuild our police force. This single agendum must be given the highest priority and must be addressed within a shortest possible time. Social accountability of all the citizens of the country irrespective of his/her standing in the society be the basic guideline for the envisaged massive exercise. We have society for the activity? prevention of crime against animal. Let us now think of the imperative necessity for building up a society for the preven-

tion of cruelty to the 'rational

animal' - human being, to be

precise.

Vajpayee Govt Getsa Breather

The present government in India may survive for some more time but the cracks of fragility will continue to haunt since the recalcitrant allies will continue to trouble it and the BJP at one stage may also feel that it can no longer appease them ...

MATTERS ##

AROUND US

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

THE mood was upbeat in the ruling circles particularly in the dominant Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the multi-party coalition after the news came from southern state of Tamil Nadu that AIDMK party led by former chief minister in the state Ms Jayaram Jayalalitha has decided not to withdraw its support from the federal government at the moment. The support of the regional party to the BJP-led government is critical in the sense that the nearly five-month-old authority in New Delhi will simply collapse if the AIDMK calls it. The government headed by Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been walking a tightrope eversince it was installed following the last general elections as his BJP fell much short of required majority to govern the country and it had to rely on several parties - mostly small and regional to form the government. Their support enabled the BJP to form the coalition government but the margin of the majority in the lower house of parliament (Lokshaba) is so razor-thin that the government can be pulled down if any of these supporting parties commanding even ten members of parliament turns a volte-face.

Paradoxically, some allies of the ruling coalition have been putting pressure on the government almost from the beginning of the

issues like berths for their party leaders in the ministry, demands for concessions to the state that these regional parties represent, and even unexpected leniency from federal government on corruption-related charges in exchange of the support. These have put strain on the new government which was on a slippery ground also for the fact that ideologically most of the allies are different from the dominant BJP and only political expediency brought them together. The sudden and unexpected nuclear explosions by the government in last May warded off the fragility and lack of cohesion of the coalition for the time being as all involved in the rule sought to bask in the national glory and tried to put the differences on the backburner. But the problems that stem from personal ambitions and political opportunism cannot be reconciled for too long, and the inevitable is hap-

pening from time to time. As the euphoria of the

nuclear devices faded slowly, these differences

began to surface again and this time in a more

serious nature. Gloom descended on the ruling quarters for last few days when possibilities increased that the AIDMK would part from the coalition which means downfall of the Vajpayee government. Congress and others — awaiting in the wings to form the government in the event of the exit of the present one — intensified efforts to explore the grounds of their chances. BJP began to read its epitaph and political circles were agog with different speculations centering a change in the federal government. All eyes were cast on the crucial meeting that Ms Jayalalitha was having with her party colleagues in Tamil Nadu on the issue of support to the government but the news that trickled in was - the support is not being

withdrawn at the moment. The result is that the government stays at the moment. But why has the AIDMK opted for not pulling down the government at this stage when this was very much on the cards? Does this development prolong the life of the Vajpayee government considerably? What would be the course of actions of the major opposition which were eyeing on formation of new government? And finally, will Jayalalitha stick to this decision for some time to come or will soon again come out with threats to the Vajpayee government?

Obviously, the AIDMK does not like to take the responsibility of political instability much sooner than many had expected, although

Vajpayee government of which it is also a component turned a blind eye to some of its main demands. Ms Jayalalitha put forward three main demands to the federal government and all of them are complex in nature and difficult for the government to concede. First, the state government in Tamil Nadu run by the rival DMK party has to be dissolved, the water agreement with the neighbouring Karnataka state has to be done in a way liked by AIDMK and that the federal government takes a lenient view on the corruption cases against Ms Jayalalitha.

Arguably, any government caring for prudence and popularity cannot favour an ally on such issues which will boomerang on it at later stage. The Vajpayee government will immediately be dubbed as undemocratic if it applies the relevant clauses of the constitution to dismiss the DMK government in Tamil Nadu; it has to take into consideration the views of other states when resolving a water issue and cannot be too soft on the corruption charges because this will put at stake the very morality of the Vajpayee government about which Mr Vajpayee himself boasts of. Ms Jayalalitha, on

the surface, shows more concern about the water issue so that she is seen as fighting for the cause of her own state.

There is no wonder that Vajpayee government has not ac

cepted any of them while it is also keen to keep the support of AIDMK intact. Mr Vajpayee despatched defence minister George Fernandes to Ms Jayalalitha in a last-ditch effort to salvage the government and it worked. After all, the AIDMK has to bear the burnt of the responsibility if instability grips India so soon as the elections took place only early this year. Besides, the prospects of forming a new government by the Congress or other claimants did not appear bright since they also lack majority support by big margin and a lot of efforts are necessary to garner the required majority? Congress president Sonia Gandhi also likes to wait for some time before taking serious bid to form a government since she wants to be seen as not instrumental or contributing to the fall of government but give the feeling that the government collapsed only under the weight of its own differences. She feels that her party will be benefitted if not projected as hankering for power at the moment

The ruling coalition has inherent contradictions and one of them is the secular character of some of the allies while the dominant BJP and more particularly some of its leaders like home minister LK Advani and human resources minister Murli Monohar Joshi are perceived as hardliners in the communal camp of the BJP. Some of the allies also do not see eye to eye with the government on the need for explosions of the nuclear device as some quarters feel they were done for the sake of the fragile government and also on hardline stance

towards China and Pakistan. Some smaller allies like the Akali Dal in Punjab and the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal are also putting pressure on the government which is spending much of its time in reconciliation efforts with the allies. The coalition is also not fully cohesive on some domestic issues for the dominant BJP is seen by some of them as seeking to pursue potentially divisive lines on communal issues although the coalition is supposed to implement the "national agenda" approved by all allies. The government in India may survive for some more time but the scars of fragility will continue to haunt it since the recalcitrant allies will continue to trouble it and the BJP at one stage may also feel that it can no longer appease them and the opposition feels that the time is more ripe for staking claim for

OPINION

Do We Need Them?

The law and order situation of the country is prompting an otherwise silent person like myself to come forward with words of criticism, despair. frustration, hate and anger towards the law enforcers. Indeed, their alleged cozy relationship with criminals has turned them into, so to say, 'lawlessness enforcers'

I would like to thank Dr. Quader! His thought provoking article, 'Let Us Do It Now', published in The Daily Star on the 5th August was indeed very inspiring. He has rightly pointed out "Education, training, religion and vows have had little impact upon them (the police). If so they are rather a malignant tumor on the body of a civil society. Let us remove each of them (tainted police personnel) to give the civil society a hope worthy of living". However. I would like to go one step further and call for a total abolition of the police force. Discussions I have had with acquaintances at all levels of society leads me to believe that the public in general would heartily welcome such a move.

Of course, people may question how a civil society can function without the law enforcers. As an answer to that let me ask, when was the last time we saw the police enforce the law? In fact, nowadays the only time we see any police action is when any party in power wants to foil a political demonstration or hartal called by the party in opposition at the time. Oh yes! We mustn't forget the valiant role of the police in the universities! We should give due credit to their acute sense of 'good timing' when they arrive in force to show their strong presence after rival student groups have finished their fighting and left blood stains (or a few bodies) lying on the grounds. How often do we hear of the police successfully preventing or foiling real criminal

The police have now become known to the public as protectors of criminals and something aloof from the hopes with which any sane society looks towards the protectors of law

and order. Rather it looks like they themselves have become the largest, most well equipped and most influential masia force in this country!

Here is the justification of my call for abolition of the po-

lice force a) The police have totally failed to give any sense of security to the public (the same public whose taxes are used to pay their salaries!).

b) Instead of preventing crime, they are allegedly nurturing criminals and even participating in crime.

c) The presence of the police has made us become a complacent nation, happy to look on as a person is robbed in broad daylight (turning a deaf ear to calls for help) - saying, "Why should I get involved? This is a matter for the police". It is not uncommon to see a crowd of people just standing and watching a robbery take place (or running in the opposite direction, lest the robbers scorch us with their glare!). Then we happily continue with our daily chores without a twinge of guilt at having enjoyed the 'circus' of a robbing in front of us. Little do we think of the day when our own calls for help will be answered with the same deaf ear

and inert, idiotic glance. d) If the police (that we have!) did not exist then we would be forced to fend for our own protection. Every individual would have to become involved in civil defence. The new sense of awareness would compel us to come to the aid of a fellow citizen in distress. The truth is that we have become a nation of sheep and any two-bit thug finds it easy pickings when there is no resistance in the so-

e) We are often reluctant to get involved in the fear that we will be harassed by the police during questioning. All too often the innocent person, not the criminal, is harassed so that (believably) an excuse can be found to let the real criminal go scot-free! (Of course, this has to be done; otherwise how will these criminals 'earn' money to pay 'salami' to the 'protectors'?)

f) In the rare occasion when the common people do manage to apprehend the criminals, the police step in as if to protect the criminals from a 'gono pituni' And lo and behold! the criminal is soon out on the street to

prowl on the next victim. g) The police force consumes a huge portion of the national budget. Not only that, they are costly for businesses and common people who often have to pay 'tolls'. From the traffic police on the streets to the big bosses in their grand offices everybody wants a slice of the cake! I have seen traffic police order buses or trucks to stop. Then, instead of stopping, the helper/driver throws a small rolled object on the road, and the police, instead of running to stop the vehicle, runs to fetch the same! We can only guess about the extent or magnitude of the dealings when it comes to the big bosses!

h) From violent crime to petty crime, the police are contributing their part. They even contribute to the pollution and traffic jams. Polluting vehicles know that they can safely run on the streets even if they spew out thick black smoke or break simple traffic laws (e.g. travel on the wrong side of the road, stop at an undesignated spot causing a traffic jam, smash into an innocent vehicle and drive away — the list goes on and on!).

The points in favour of abolishing the police also go on and on, but I think we all know what I might have to say. So I will not take up much more space (although no paper could be accused of devoting too much space to exposing/criticizing the rot and cancer that has settled into our society).

I appeal to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and, above all, every law abiding citizen to come forward in a movement to abolish the police force and mobilize ourselves to create awareness to prevent crime and STOP THE **ROT RIGHT NOW!**

A very frustrated citizen